
Why Can't I Find Anyone in the Club with Whom to Trade Perfins?

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There have been references in the Bulletin recently and, I might add, quite a few personally fielded questions as to why trading perfins hasn't worked for Club members. After listening to hypotheses that would make our members out to be unresponsive and uncooperative, I thought that I would like to have a chance to put to rest any ideas that our members are anything but unresponsive and not cooperative. Indeed, you are the greatest group of collectors that I have ever had the pleasure to be associated with.

Based on over five years as President and fifteen as a Perfin Club member, I would like to offer my opinion and respectfully request the thoughts of any members on this subject whether or not you are in agreement.

I will limit my analysis to the collecting of United States perfins in the United States as I feel that the overwhelming majority of our members collect US perfins. However, I do believe that these ideas may be valid for anyone collecting any countries with a smaller number of perfin patterns. Notice that I am eliminating Great Britain and Germany (the two countries with more perfin patterns than the United States). These are two extremely large-count countries, 24,000 patterns in Great Britain and 12,000 in Germany, and the patterns of both countries are "unrated"! It is my belief that trading of these two countries can be done because the collectors *are not confined* to the rating/value parameters and a vastly greater number of perfin patterns exist.

All United States commercial perfin patterns are scarcity rated, and have been for over forty years. John Randall's latest, 1998 edition of the *Catalog of United States Perfins*, of which I hope every member has a copy by now, is excellent in the ratings given the 6400 plus commercial perfin patterns. Very few changes have been made over the past six years in these ratings. However, it is only natural to expect changes as more material comes into collector's hands. It would seem that

when trading with other collectors, in all fairness, this catalog should be used as a basis. You could trade a D+ for a D+, or two C's for a C+ or whatever is agreed upon between individuals before trading.

Now, for the problems. A collector having, let's say 5,000 different perfin patterns will have all but possibly one or two of the perfins rated C+ or less and will have most of the B rated and a fair number of the B+ and even a few A rated items. To trade with a collector with a like number of perfin patterns means that each must have some duplicates of A, B+ or B rated perfins needed by the other. But, since A rated perfins are known in quantity of 10 or fewer; B+ in quantities of 11 to 20; and B in quantity of only 21 to 40, the actual chance of these traders having what each other needs is exceedingly small! Certainly, this collector can not hope to trade with someone with a collection of fewer patterns, because those collectors don't even have singles, let alone duplicates of the higher rated patterns, and especially the patterns any advanced collector needs. I do know this to be factual as I have had a very difficult time trading perfins myself.

It seems that the only way an advanced collector can gain more patterns is by watching the Club and private auctions and by purchasing a large collection, should that opportunity be afforded. Unfortunately, an advanced collection can be pricy, when available. In recent memory, one of the best opportunities to obtain high rated perfins was at the annual convention a couple of years ago when John Randall disposed of his 5900+ US pattern collection on an item by item basis to those collectors at the convention. Thank you, John for the help you gave to me and, I'm certain, to many others!

If we carry forward the ideas from the preceding paragraphs, let's say a collector has a perfin collection of about 3000 patterns (not quite half the known US perfins). This collector might have a few A and B+ rated, maybe a hundred B perfins, half the C+ and 80 percent of the C perfins. Naturally, there will be a half-dozen lower rated and many personal

perfin on this collector's want list. This collector can not trade with someone who has 4000 or more patterns in their collection because they do not have anything the more advanced collector needs. And, they cannot trade with someone having 1000 or 2,000 perfins as these collectors probably have nothing that they need! The only chance is in finding a collector with about the same number of patterns in their collection – 3,000. But take time to analyze where all the duplicates are. They are in the lower rated perfins, naturally. This is where both collectors are strong. There is some hope that they might find three or four perfins to trade on a one time basis but then trading abruptly stops because of lack of duplicates that each other needs.

A beginning collector has little but the easiest of material to trade and may not have been collecting for a long enough period of time to even have made any contacts. Many collectors start collecting by trying to gather as much material as they can and then obtain the necessary catalogs that have the information as to what they possess and then feel comfortable enough to sometimes make contacts and get involved in Club activities. I believe this is a very good way to start a perfin collection. However, trading is probably one of the activities furthest from this collectors mind.

Is there a solution to this problem. I believe so. The solution rests with each and every collector. As our Club continues to grow, the tough perfins only get tougher!

Collectors should be willing to sell duplicate perfins at a rate agreed upon by the buyer and seller. For what reason should a collector desire to hold onto A, B+, or B rated perfins when the opportunity to trade is virtually non-existent. Why not make another collector happy while at the same time pick up a few dollars for yourself that can then be spent on material you might need when it comes up in auction. If you don't want to sell it directly, send it to our Club auctioneer. Please identify the perfin by pattern and rating; the stamp in which it is punched by Scott#; and any flaws that you might notice, before you send it to our auctioneer. Please remember that identification of materials is not his job, he has enough to do with the running of the

auction! Again, you will make another collector happy and obtain a few dollars for yourself.

Collectors should be diligent in trying to obtain perfins from dealers and other non-perfin collectors. I know that this is not always easy but it can be very rewarding. Join a local stamp club, visit area bourses and regional shows. Make yourself known.

"If you collect only one area or country, pick up any perfins you can." This was the most valuable piece of perfin collecting information I ever received at the beginning of my perfin collecting days. It came from Bob Schwerdt. Bob had asked me what I collected and I responded that (at that time) I was only collecting France. Bob told me that finding any perfins was difficult enough but if I turned away most of what was offered, the sources would soon dry up as dealers wouldn't want to put forth any effort on my behalf. Additionally, if I did get perfins from other countries there were always perfin collectors who would be willing to trade with me for French perfins or to buy them outright from me. That advice was "golden"! The best trades that I have made have been with perfins of one country for perfins of another. So, for our new collectors and indeed for all our collectors, heed the same advice that I received from Bob. It is as valid today as it was years ago. A vast majority of my trades have been conducted with other members by trading the perfins of one country for those of another.

Remember our Club has auctions, as well as stamp and cover sales. These work and are used by members because they have duplicates or other material in which they are not interested. Other members benefit because they use these resources; they have contact with the stamp and cover managers and participate in the auctions.

This article might not have given you the answer that you were hoping it would. But I hope that it has helped open your eyes to some methods of building yourself a fine perfin collection. If you have any comments or questions that you would like aired, please feel free to write the Editor. If you desire to make any observations or have questions of me, please feel free to contact me at any time. My address, e-mail and phone are on the back page.